

“Passing on the Blessing”

Genesis 49:1-12, 22-26



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Today is not only Mother’s Day. It is the day we take special time to remember who we are as Christian families. And please remember that the word family doesn’t just refer to a husband, wife and 2.1 children. I include here single parent families, blended families, extended families and possibly even church families. Today, I have a vitally important question for you as parents and grandparents: “Are you passing on the blessing?” By the blessing, I mean the legacy of love, guidance and edification that will enable your children and grandchildren to have a chance at life’s best in Jesus Christ? I will be using two sources this morning. The first is God’s holy Word as we look together at the final blessing Jacob gave to his children before he died. That blessing was huge as it expressed final approval or disapproval and often had economic implications. The second source is a marvelous book

by Christian psychologists, Gary Smalley and John Trent entitled, *The Blessing*. The truth is that many families do not pass on the blessing. In fact, many of us have had to find another family, possibly a friend’s family, another group or even a church family who would pass on the blessing. Many families pass on curses instead of blessings and no doubt, many of you have stories of passed on curses. Jacob in our scripture lesson from Genesis passes on both, three curses and two blessings. And my guess is that, because we are human, most of our families pass on both as well.

In the second of the ten commandments, about not making idols, God says this, **For I, the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.**

One of the repeated Old Testament phrases is “for a thousand generations.” The average generation is about 30 years, so if we want to be literal about it, it is God’s desire to bless his children for 30,000 years – a long time! The point here is that blessing and curse can be passed from generation to generation. In Jacob’s case, he was part of a horrible blessing experience with his twin brother, Esau. In fact, Jacob stole the blessing of Esau and it was the source of great hatred between them. Now Jacob passes on his blessing. The pattern of passing on blessings and curses often has cycles. I invite you this morning to make sure what you pass on as parents and grandparents is that which is loving, guiding and building in the lives of your children and grandchildren.

The first element of passing on the blessing is offering repeated *meaningful touch*. Biologists have discovered that when people offer positive touch to one another it raises the hemoglobin levels in their blood. When Jacob blessed his children he would call them one by one and lay hands on each child’s head and pronounce his blessing. When, in worship services, we share in confirmation, pray for one another’s healing, or even celebrate ordination, there is the laying on of hands. It was my mother who guided our family into positive touch. The Metz side of the family hugs a lot and even kisses on the lips. I can still taste the smoke and alcohol on one of my Aunt’s lips (ugh!). The Cotton side is more reserved, so my mom had to teach us to be more affectionate. Tina would tell you that one of the key developments in our relationship was when I learned to be more affectionate with her. Parents and grandparents, hug your kids. Hug them when they’re children, when they’re teenagers, and when they’re adults. It is a tangible way of

passing on the blessing. They will then do the same with their kids.

The second element of passing on the blessing is through our ***affirming and liberating words***. How many of us know that the words we speak create reality for people both now and in the future? Jacob gathers his sons together before he dies and his words are formative. How formative are our words? I grew up in a “there’s no such word as ‘can’t’ family. The biblical version of that is Philippians 4:13. My dad did not allow negative, can’t language, even when we failed. In so doing, he helped build an optimistic and creative household.

I regret that many grow up in households where negative language of control and stifling rules the day. A parent says, “You’re lazy. You’ll never amount to anything.” You may say, “Well it’s the truth.” But the question is not whether what you say is accurate, but rather whether you want that to be the condition of your child in the future. People often fulfill the labels we put on them. So often, I hear parents say things like, “I’m so disappointed in you.” They would be less harmful if they just pulled out a loaded gun and shot the child. Shame language is lethal. I said that once to a 13-year-old boy in summer camp and I saw his face fall and become deeply angry in a way that made me vow never to say that again. Why did I say it? Because I saw a fellow counselor use it and saw that it got the control she needed. I wonder why she used it. Perhaps it was used on her, maybe at home. That’s how the culture of curse is passed on horizontally from relationship to relationship and vertically from generation to generation. I ask you, this morning, “Does the language you use with your loved ones (as well as in the other arenas of your life, for that matter) build and liberate or does it control and stifle?” Are you passing on the blessing or are you passing on the curse? If the environment you grew up in was controlling and stifling, you will have to work and claim the grace of God to keep from repeating it. And the difference is as near as your tongue.

The third element is ***expressing high value***. One of the curses that Jacob passed on to his children was the one that was passed on to him. Father Isaac favored Esau and mother Rebekah favored Jacob. Jacob favored his strong son Judah (even though his character was more than somewhat suspect as Genesis 30 shows). And he really favored his son Joseph, the firstborn of his favorite wife, Rachel. Rachel had only two sons, Joseph and Benjamin, and she died giving birth to Benjamin. That favoritism of Joseph and his willingness to milk it for all it was worth nearly cost Joseph his life. How important it is to express high value to our children and grandchildren and to do it across the board. We forget that we live in a very competitive society in which value is communicated to the few and devaluation is communicated to the many. Take time to be vulnerable with each other and say what you mean to each other. Your child will not be weak if you say “I love you.” You will be weak for not saying it. Your child will not be egotistical because you say “I’m proud of you.” The child will be insecure if you don’t say it and will play power and manipulation games the rest of his or her life. Waiting until the wedding to say what you mean will be too late as the photographer, the bridesmaids and the minister will interrupt. Waiting until your deathbed will be resented as the person will wonder why you waited so long. It is with great regret that I tell you that I have had families say to me hundreds of times during funeral preparations, “I know he loved me” or “I know she loved us.” He/She just wasn’t the kind to say it. Let that not be said of you. Take the time today to express high value to those you love. They will remember and they will pass on the blessing to their children and grandchildren.

The fourth element of passing on the blessing is ***picturing a special future***.

When I joined the United Methodist Church in 1981, the senior pastor said to me, “This is a good day for Grace and a good day for the United Methodist Church.” As a spiritual father in the faith, he pronounced blessing and it has been formative in far greater ways than he dreamed. I remember that there was a man named Mr. Elliot in Corsicana who said to me when I was a student associate pastor, “Someday, you will be a Presiding Elder. That was the old word for a District Superintendent.” When I was asked by our

bishop to be a superintendent 18 years later, I remembered Mr. Elliot's words. He would be shocked that I remember and treasure his remarks, but his words were formative.

When Jesus called people to follow him he invited them into a new future, to be part of a kingdom that would change the world and to enter life that was more than just the here and now. At the end of the multimedia presentation last week, Matt put up the scripture verse from Jeremiah 29:11: **“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”**

At the time the people of Israel received those words from God they were in exile and everything looked hopeless. You can endure just about anything if you know you're headed somewhere. I believe every child should feel that he or she has a destiny, that he or she has a God-given, purposeful future. Jacob communicated that only to Judah and Joseph. Judah ended up becoming the line of many kings for the nation of Israel. Joseph became the third most powerful man in Egypt and saved his family and a nation from starvation. Our children will live up to the futures we declare for them.

The fifth element in passing on the blessing is *an active commitment*. Matt's version of this sermon is done with the acronym T.I.M.E. You have heard me say it before that, as far as relationships go, there is no such thing quality of time without quantity of time. Jacob spent extra time with Judah and Joseph, and after Joseph left home, with Benjamin. And they became different people. What are your children or grandchildren's hopes and dreams, fears and obstacles? Do they know you are interested and that you are with them? And then there will need to be *sacred moments*.

At a particular time early on in my ministry, I was very down and wondered if I wouldn't just go back and do music. That feeling has happened more than once. It was my 32nd birthday. My dad knew how I was feeling. My dad diverted a business trip and took a plane, which ended up going through Albuquerque to get to El Paso. That same day I had a meeting in Albuquerque. Dad almost got bumped back to my flight, which would have been hilarious. In fact, Dad was afraid I would be on his flight, so he hid behind a newspaper in the back of his plane. He actually beat me getting there. I came home and Tina said, “Let me show you what I made you, here in the refrigerator.” It was a beautiful cheesecake. Then I heard a voice out of the laundry room saying, “Hello, son.” Needless to say there were hugs and tears, taught us both by my affectionate mom. We sat together the next day and he said, “I just had to come and see if my dreamer had died.” I assured him the dreamer was very alive, but I also know that sacred moment has kept me dreaming lots of times since then.

Meaningful touch. Affirming and liberating words. Expressions of high value. Picturing a special future. An active commitment with sacred moments. These are the ways we pass on the blessing. This morning I am going to invite you to the altar for a special time. I invite you to come as couples, as friends, as families to share in a time of special blessing. One of the great places for us to pass this blessing is as God's family the church. It can become a reinforcement place for our families of blood and help us to be sources of blessing to the human family we speak to and touch every day. Come, let us receive God's blessing and bless one another.